

RECKLESS RALPH'S

DIME NOVEL ROUND-UP



A monthly magazine devoted to the collecting, preservation and literature of the old-time dime and nickel novels, libraries and popular story papers.

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JULES VERNE:

The Biography of an Imagination
By George H. Waltz, Jr.

A Review by Nat Bengis

Vice-President, American Jules Verne Society

On January 6, 1942, Ripley, in his Believe It Or Not column, published an item on Jules Verne with this caption: "The great French author who wrote amazing tales of adventure in almost all parts of the world—NEVER TRAVELED IN ANY OF THEM! He made only two short trips in his whole life." While a man with Ripley's reputation for painstaking accuracy should be more adequately informed, it is unfortunately true that this misconception of Verne as a stay-at-home story writer is very widespread. It is therefore high time for a good biography of the great romancer to appear in English. This need is well supplied by George H.

Waltz, Jr.'s recently published book: Jules Verne; The Biography of an Imagination. It is the second book on the subject to appear within recent times, an earlier one by Kenneth Allott having appeared in 1941. Mr. Allott's book, however, was less a work on Verne than a dissertation on the historical, social, and literary background of Verne's times. The author of the present book does not make the same mistake, and while he does not neglect to sketch in the historical background, he seems to do so more as a concession to the vogue in biographical literature than because it is necessary to an understanding of the man. So little did the political situation impinge on Verne's consciousness that practically nowhere in his writings do we see the impact of it. Wars and revolutions were an ugly reality to esape from at all costs. Nothing is more humorous in Mr. Waltz's book than his description of how Verne, in 1870, tried to carry out his commis-



sion as a captain of his own ship, to help protect the Bay of the Somme against the Prussians. He was not lacking in patriotism, but his common sense told him to stick to his writing and let his crew fish and sleep and stay on the lookout.

The author does not pretend to have written a definitive biography of Jules Verne. The book is too brief for that, and Mr. Waltz admits that part of the story has been fictionalized on account of lack of source material on certain parts of Verne's life. This romanticized treatment of the gaps in a celebrity's life is regrettable, because we are left guessing where fact ceases and fancy begins. But this is a minor criticism in an otherwise excellent book. The author traces, in a simple and very readable style and with an abundance of homely detail, Verne's childhood at Nantes, his stay in Paris—the Ultima Thule of his early dreams, his visit to Alexandre Dumas, and his first contact with his patron-publisher, the man who was to put Verne on the path to recognition and fame: Pierre Jules Hetzel. The account of Verne's struggle to find himself, his rebellion against his father's determination to fit him into a groove where he did not belong, his great jubilation on finding his real life work, reads like a grand success story. Any one who has struggled to achieve anything and has met naught but rebuff and failure for many years, will share Verne's trepidation as he mounts the stairs to Hetzel's bedchamber on the occasion of that memorable first meeting, then waits in the dark ground as the Great Man peruses page after page, "with a tilt of the head, a smile, a frown." Then the pronouncement from the Oracle: "People want to be amused, not educated." It was a fatal interview, and a fatal judgment. Certain it is that Hetzel deserves to go down in history as one of the greatest patrons of literature—a true Maecenas in every sense.

Jules Verne's place in the history of scientific fiction is unquestionably secure, even though in many of his works he is not so scientific as many of his admirers would believe. It is well known, as stressed by the author, that Verne had all his data checked and double-checked by expert scientists. But the truth is that very often

despite all the formulae and algebraic symbols he marshals forth to dazzle his reader, he really has his tongue in his cheek and does not intend to be taken too seriously. In "A Journey to the Center of the Earth" the adventurers are tossed through the inferno of erupting Mount Etna, yet they come out without a scratch. In "Hector Servadac" the characters who have been careening through space on the comet Gallia take refuge in a balloon when the comet is known to be approaching the earth. The terrestrians awake from the cataclysmic contact without a bruise to show. In the extravaganza "The Purchase of the North Pole" we see science run amuck. A syndicate is formed to mine the coal which is supposed to be under the arctic regions, and the glaciers are going to be melted by the simple expedient of displacing the pole by a mere 23 degrees 28', thereby bringing the pole under the direct rays of the Sun! Surely this is science with a vengeance, but not meant to be taken with a straight face! The masterpiece, however, is in "From the Earth to the Moon," where the projectile falls back from the sky onto the earth, and far from being volatilized in the earth's atmosphere, tumbles very dramatically into the sea. And when the rescue party comes alongside and looks through the scuttle of the projectile, there are Barbicane, Ardan, and Nicholl, calmly engaged in a sociable game of dominoes! The delicious humor of these anti-climaxes seems to have escaped most commentators, who have failed to see that Verne is not so much interested in science for its own sake as in the background it offers for telling an absorbing story. In no tale is Verne's contempt for the scientist who is completely divorced from humanity shown more clearly than in "The Green Ray." Aristobulus Ursilos is the *reductio ad absurdum* of the scientist who sees every fact in the world and every human relationship as a scientific formula. Through the medium of this caricature Verne also castigated himself; he is in effect saying to himself: "This scientific hocus-pocus must not be carried too far. After all, my first business is still to amuse, not to educate."

Verne's crowning disappointment was his failure to be elected to mem-

bership in the French Academy. On this account he considered himself a failure as far as his chief aim was concerned: to take his place in the literature of France. It is regrettably true that in most reference works on French literature his name is not even mentioned. Perhaps the fault lay not with Verne but with the Academy. If "Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea" and "Around the World in Eighty Days" are not literary masterpieces, neither are "Tom Sawyer" and "Huckleberry Finn," yet these books are read and will be read with delight by millions yet unborn, whereas Scott and Cooper—acknowledged literary masters—are to-day hardly read except by antiquarians. The judgment of humanity outweighs that of any academy, and if the opinion of the world counts for aught, Verne deserves a seat with the immortals of literature.

Mr. Waltz has embellished his book with an excellent bibliography and an index. The list of Verne's works in English titles contains several errors which should be corrected in a later edition.

EDW. L. WHEELER'S OWN VIEW OF "WILD BILL" HICKOCK

(By "Seajay")

In running over the pages of Ed. Wheeler's novel, "Omaha Oil" in Pocket Lby. #33, the writer ran across an asterisk on p. 3 in the context and noted the following remark: "Once WILD BILL learned of his accomplishments with a gun, and that people feared him, he made a ruffian of himself at every opportunity." This footnote follows:

"WILD BILL had been made a hero in story and on the stage, and now that he is dead it is perhaps best not to haul him over the fire, but the Western Border never knew a man who more deserved a rope and a limb than he, before Jack McCall avenged his brother's death in Deadwood. Bill was a dissolute bravo and a cut-throat." (Cheap, rotten liquor no doubt did its work on Bill).

Frank Richards, long-time writer of school and adventure stories for British boys' weeklies, is again, he says, "as busy as ever" writing for publication. Stories of his new fiction-

school, Carcroft, have been appearing quarterly in the English magazine, "Pie," during the past year. Recently there was published what is intended to be the first of a series of tales of another fiction-school, Sparshott "The Mystery of the School," while yet another series is projected, for girls.

—By Wm. H. Gander.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCHES OF FAMOUS FRONTIERSMEN

Kit Carson, Scout and Indian Fighter

There is no other frontiersman who has figured in stories and in Western history as has Kit Carson.

He was born in Kentucky Dec. 24, 1809, and when a child moved with his parents to Missouri. When 17 yrs. old he joined a party going west, which brought him into the practically unexplored wilderness of all this region west of the Missouri river, especially Colorado.

For eight years he was a hunter for Bent's fort, and in the years that followed a guide for Fremont's expeditions in Colorado; Indian Fighter, trapper, scout, Union officer, friend of the Indians, and on page after page of Colorado history his name was written.

Kit Carson was taken sick in Denver on his return from a trip to Washington on a peace mission with the Ute Indians. He recovered sufficiently to go to Fort Lyon, in the San Luis Valley, where he died May, 24, 1868. He was buried in Boggsville, his old home near Lar Animas, but later his body was removed to Taos, and interred where a monument was erected to his memory.

Carson's name is linked with gaps, springs, trails, and mountains in Colorado, especially in the San Luis Valley, where he lived for so many years.

This is the first of a series of Sketches of famous frontiersmen.

Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year to all.

—Clyde F. Wakefield.

FAVORITES OF YESTERDAY— #1

SUSAN WARNER

By Hermon Pitcher

There was a time when two novels — "The Wide, Wide World," and

"Queechy," were the theme of many a literary conversation.

The author of these two books was Susan Warner. She was born in New York City, of a Puritan stock, transplanted to the great metropolis. With her younger sister, Anna, she was brought up in modest luxury. However, the family became impoverished, and at the age of 18, Susan found herself the head and support of the family. Her mother had died, and by her high-minded, but wholly unworldly, father had been stripped, by unscrupulous people, of the remnants of a shrinking competence.

In affluent days he had bought Constitution Island, in the Hudson, near West Point, as a country estate; now it served as a refuge. Susan Warner, with the aid of her sister, maintained a heroic struggle against poverty. At times the little family knew something of destitution. Sometimes they were forced actually to use a piece of cotton rag in a saucer of lard for an improvised light, because they had no money to buy candles. The two sisters worked in their garden to raise part of their food, and found both joy and solace in planting seeds, and working among the growing shoots.

Susan had an "itch for scribbling," and she turned to writing, hoping by that to obtain a source of income. Perhaps too, a desperate need for the family gave power to her pen. It was in 1849 she finished her first book, "The Wide, Wide World," and sent it to publisher after publisher. But each rejected it. "Elizabeth Wetherwell," as she had signed herself was a new writer, and they did not think this manuscript worth while.

However, when Miss Warner sent it to Mr. Putnam he accepted it and published it. It was an eternal paradox in the world of literature, for it swept over the reading public irresistibly. In its heyday of popularity it was translated into French, German, and Swedish. It is said to have been the most widely circulated book, next to "Uncle Tom's Cabin" of the century. There was a story, too, that ten thousand "pirated" copies of "The Wide, Wide World," were sold at a single railway station in England.

The vogue of its book brought money to its publisher and to its author. The Warners were tided over their

financial difficulty for a time. So pleased was she with the success of her first effort that Miss Warner wrote "Queechy," which was published two years later. This proved as popular and as successful as its predecessor.

The Warner sisters then went with their father and their aunt to New York to their old family home, which, through the kindness of some of their friends had been kept for them, and took a modest part in the literary society of the time, especially at the receptions given by Mr. Putnam, their kindly publisher, where they met many famous people.

Susan Warner wrote other books which became popular, but had not such large sales as her first two. One of them "The Hills of the Shatemuck," was a pleasing tale full of scenic description. Ten thousand copies of it were sold on the day of its first appearance.

Anna Warner collaborated with her sister in several novels, and also wrote many under her own name. On March 17th, 1885, Susan Warner died in Highland Falls, N. Y., at the age of 66 years, leaving her sister to keep burning the torch which she had kept lighted.

A critic has written this: "A strong and genuinely mystic religious sense sustained her throughout her life. Her vision of the world was intense, and perhaps correspondingly narrow. One divined in her the passionate incompatibility which averages in life and thought, and characterized a kindred, if much abler, spirit—Charlotte Bronte.

She, keenly intellectual, and apparently a little suspicious of alien excellence, her quality was attractive. There was a kind of genius in her of which her books are an inadequate expression. Her extensive journals of her struggles, which are both pathetic and heartening reading, are authentic and vivid pictures of the afterglow of Puritanism. There is a quaint and homely flavor about her intimate writings which is also paradoxically highly distinguished."

. ALAS, THAT TRUTH MUST PREVAIL!

By Seajay

A recent issue of the "CORONET"

Magazine, contained the following "heartbreaker"—:

"He, (Buffalo Bill Cody), was a road grader, a day-laborer, carpenter, freight-handler, mule-skinner, Pony Express rider, inn-keeper and hunter, and a failure at all of them. Then hunted buffalo (cows) for a living but when the K. P. Ry. moved on, he was broke as usual. He hired as a scout for the U. S. 5th Cavalry, and it was there that Judson, ("Ned Buntline") found him asleep under a wagon. Judson was a "writer," one of the worst of his or any other generation, but through fanfare and his inventive genius, Cody, with not five years of Western experience behind him, at once became—

The most famous buffalo (cow) killer. The greatest Scout.

The most intrepid Indian killer in the world.

He toured Europe and was fawned upon by Queen Victoria, the kings of Denmark, Belgium, Greece and Saxony and rode atop a Deadwood Coach with the Prince of Wales.

Buntline had never written well, had never done anything well, but he did well for Cody and eventually died and nobody cared. The figure of the dauntless hero which he made of Cody remains his monument."

NEWSY NEWS

by Ralph F. Cummings

Wm. B. McCafferty of Fort Worth, Texas, has been through New Mexico, Colorado, So. Dakota and various other places this fall, on his vacation. He was up to the Museum and saw relics of Buffalo Bill, Deadwood Dick, Calamity Jane, Wild Bill, Sitting Bull, Custer and many others. Bill and his wife are getting to be real travelers. Bill says his trip to Denver recalled, naturally, the story "Young Wild West and the Double Device, or the Domino Gang of Denver."

Bill has also wondered all his life who wrote the Young Wild West stories, he was surprised to learn it was Cornelius Shea. Bill says he'd like to see a serial of some fine old novel run in Roundup, if it was only bigger.

J. R. Abarbanell was editor for Norman L. Munro's Story Paper, Family Story Paper, known as the Munro

Publishing House. Norman Munro and his brother George who published the Fireside Companion, were rivals, as they hated each other. Kate F. Hill was really Mrs. Baer who lived in Philadelphia. Her first name and address is unknown. Louise A. McCarty was her proper name. Eva Evergreen was Mrs. E. H. Hough, Bertie Harcourt was Wm. H. Muldoon, J. R. Abarbanell wrote the Joe Dodger stories, also most of the Harrigan & Hart stories, Adah Howard used to receive \$30.00 for each of her installments, Lillian R. Drayton was John R. Corryell, Evelyn Malcolm was Kate A. Jordan.

Colliers Weekly has a writeup on old novels, in Nov. 24th 1945 issue. Has illustrations of Diamond Dick, Tip Top, New Neck Carter, Rover Boys, and War Adventure Library. Title "For Boys Only."

Col. Charles D. Randolph sent "Reckless Ralph," Last Survivor of a Dime Novel publication, the Dime Novel Roundup. And their best hombrey east o' ther Allaganeys, a galoot, a pard can tie to in any storm—be it road-agents er' redskins, er' tin horn gamblers from back in ther states. Yes sir, Reckless Ralph Cummings is one o' them fellers like Ned Buntline, Col. Prentiss Ingraham, and Burt L. Standish, who just cashed in his check with his boots off.

Others that have passed to the great beyond, are H. O. Rawson, 53 Channing St., Worcester, Mass. Member 39. Who died Nov. 2nd, after being sick quite some time. He was known in the Brotherhood as the "Pen and Ink Man," as he loved to draw all the old characters of the West, such as Scouts, Road-agents, Plainsmen, and what not. His trade was drawing pictures of shoes for catalogues, etc. Also Wm. B. McCafferty lost his dear mother and Bill Gander lost his father, and Wm. S. Williamson a brother. God Bless them all, and let's all hope they are in a better land than this world of suffering.

Ye editor Cummings wishes one and all a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. On account of his losses this year, he won't be able to send out any cards this year, except to make this Dec. No. of Roundup a little larger than usual.

Clyde Wakefield will run a series of

Biographical sketches of all the Famous Frontiersmen and Bandits in the Roundup from now on. See No. 1 on Kit Carson.

Wait until you see the new Index-Digest of the Roundup which will be published soon, enough to knock your eye out, oh boy, it's something badly needed by all. Better get your order in for a copy before you forget. Geo. Flaum sure did a wonderful job in compiling all this together, so if you wonder if such and such a thing ever appeared in Roundup, just look in the Index-Digest and there it is. Thanks for the fine piece of work, George.

Wait until you see the Happy Hours Brotherhoods two new reproductions, they are humdingers. Wide Awake Library No. 451 The Life of Billy the Kid, also Nugget Library, Tom Edison Jr.'s Electric Sea Turtle. Both fine numbers and worth \$1.00 each. The Billy the Kid item is a very scarce item from the collection of J. C. Dykes.

Flash, just in, Gilbert A. Rogers, a former member of the Brotherhood way back in the early 30's has died out in Toledo, Ohio. God Bless him always.

Look for Cummings Bargains here and there, now and then in the Round-Up.

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NAT BENGIS

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Letters and cards containing valuable information and advise about novels have been received. Frequently items that I had need of have been supplied at a very nominal cost.

Your spirit of helpfulness has been appreciated and I am indebted to all of you for many Happy Hours during the past twelve months.

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